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International Dateline-News from South Africa and Important Developments in the UK over the Reed/Harcourt Merger

Martin White

Intranet Focus, Ltd., Martin.White@intranetfocus.com

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TOOTING THE HORN FOR GROVE

by **Bruce Strauch** (the Citadel)

The New Grove Dictionary of Music gets the royal *New Yorker* treatment. Author describes it as "a magnificent achievement, and, more than that, it is a work of love." — which it has been since **Sir George Grove** launched it in 1889. The author urges "Libraries should think twice before casting it (that 1st ed.) aside" — which is hard to imagine a library doing, but in the age of wholesale destruction of paper, who knows?

Grove, a bridge engineer, was a music fanatic among the first to notice **Franz Schubert**. The latest edition of his enterprise will include a constantly updated online version and much expanded coverage of 20th century music.

The **Zywny** of the article title was **Chopin's** piano teacher.

See — **Alex Ross**, "ABBA to ZYWNY" in *New Yorker*, pp. 82-86, July 9, 2001.

HG BROWN IS A HARD ACT TO FOLLOW

by **Bruce Strauch** (the Citadel)

A rash of firings and personnel shake-ups at venerable title womens' magazines is putting the spotlight on the deadly competition for readership. Ever since **Helen Gurley Brown** slapped that cleavage on the front of *Cosmo*, every zine felt it had to follow suit. Now even *Redbook* is trumpeting sex on its cover. Which makes it hard for the buyer to know what to pick off the rack.

Then along came single theme niche magazines — including the ultimate Condé Nast product *Lucky* which is dedicated exclusively to *shopping* — to dangerously crowd the field.

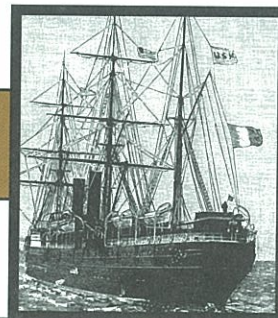
Meanwhile other income sources are bleak. Wholesalers are cutting distribution of weak titles, attorneys general are posturing about the sweepstakes, and ad revenues are sliding towards the toilet.

See — **Matthew Rose**, "What Do Women Want — to Read?" in *Wall Street Journal*, p. B1, June 4, 2001.

International Dateline —

News from South Africa and Important Developments in the UK over the Reed/Harcourt Merger

by **Martin White** (Managing Director, Intranet Focus Ltd., 12 Allcard Close, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 5AJ; Phone: +44 1403 267030) <martin.white@intranetfocus.com>
www.intranetfocus.com



Please Note: British spelling has been retained. — KS

I suspect that most of us have an ambivalent view of conferences. Although in theory they represent an opportunity to learn and to network, all too often the papers are not of a consistent quality, or the organisation was notable for its absences. I am therefore pleased to be able to report that in June I attended a conference which for me set a new benchmark in quality. The papers were uniformly excellent, the time-keeping was within five minutes of the due time for the entire conference, the catering was very good, the workshops were well attended, all the technology worked and all the 320 delegates came prepared to network. In addition, the organisers had laid on a partial solar eclipse!

You might assume that such a conference probably took place in Germany, or maybe the UK, but in fact this was the 6th **South African Online Information Meeting**, presented by the **South African Online User Group** (www.saoug.org.za) and held at **Caesars Convention Centre**, Johannesburg, on 20-21 June. I had been invited by **SAOUG** to present a workshop on corporate portals and give a keynote paper on technology trends. The **SAOUG** had joined forces with the **Special Libraries and Information Services Group** and the **Organisation of South African Law Libraries**, and the result was a programme of some 25 papers which covered the broadest possible spectrum of online informa-

tion access and delivery in South Africa.

Listening to the papers, and talking to the delegates and exhibitors, I gained something of the complexity of the social, political, educational and economic factors in South Africa. One paper in particular brought home to me the problems that librarians and information managers face in South Africa. **Di Kruger** is the Librarian of the **Rand Merchant Bank**, and one of her staff wished to work on a telecommute basis, continuing to provide research services from her home some ten hours drive from Johannesburg. This would involve providing an ISDN connection, and to cut a long story short the telephone charges for the first month were 12,000 Rand. In straight currency terms this is around \$1400, but you need to multiply this cost by a factor of perhaps 3 to translate the cost into US real cost terms! Although the telecommunications cost was able to be reduced in subsequent months it was still a very significant factor and had to be taken into account in assessing the viability of the exercise. Terrestrial telecommunications are still in the hands of **South African Telkom**, which has a monopoly, and the high cost of telephone calls has a very significant impact on all aspects of online searching.

Another impact of the weakness of the Rand against the US\$ is the high price of online service subscriptions and e-journals. Some companies, notably **Dialog**, have not imposed a monthly minimum rate for South Africa, as this was proving a deterrent to subscribers. In doing so the level of use rose, as it provided easier to justify search

costs against an individual project or requirement than have to commit to a minimum in advance without any reliable measure of use. Other companies seem to be taking a less flexible route, and there seemed to be some annoyance with the approach of **LexisNexis**, which is a key database for South Africa because of the way in which its laws often use UK law as a precedent. However, the attitude of most of the exhibitors I spoke to was that deals have to be done, and it is better to gain some business and a satisfied customer than try to do a deal by the book.

Which leads me neatly onto copyright. The current copyright law dates back to 1978 and was modelled around the UK Copyright Act. A new Act is now in preparation and there is real concern on the part of the library community that the Act will be biased towards the interests of media owners. **Denise Nicholson** <Nicholson.d@library.wits.ac.za> of **Wits University** has put an enormous amount of personal effort into lobbying on behalf of the library community, and I know would appreciate support and advice from copyright experts in the USA. This is clearly an important issue in South Africa, and **SAOUG** had invited **Professor Charles Oppenheim**, **Loughborough University**, UK, and an expert on legal issues in information work, to give a keynote. (Incidentally the 4th edition of **Professor Oppenheim's** book on *The Legal and Regulatory Environment for Electronic Information* has just been

continued on page 87

International Dateline from page 86


published by **Infonortics Ltd.**)

Another important issue is that of information literacy, which as you can imagine is of crucial importance in raising the educational standard and economic performance of South Africa. The feeling that I gained was that there were many information literacy projects underway, but that senior management support in both the universities and in the corporate sector was poor. A feature of the university sector in South Africa is the extent of distance learning, given the geographic size of the country, and the highly dispersed centres of population. The challenges in providing access to both Web and online resources against a background of high telecommunications charges and expensive and inflexible subscription policies from information vendors are considerable. There is a Centre for Information Literacy at the **University of Cape Town**, under the direction of **Peter Underwood** (<http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/sol/default.htm>).

There are of course a number of library consortia in South Africa, the largest of which is the **Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC)** (www.gaelic.ac.za) which represents the interests of the **University of Pretoria**, **University of Witwatersrand**, **Rand Afrikaans University**, **University of South Africa**, **Medical University of Southern Africa**, **Technikon Pretoria**, **Technikon Southern Africa**, **Technikon Witwatersrand**, **Vista University**, **Technikon Northern Gauteng**, **Vaal Triangle Technikon**, and **Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education**, amongst others. There is also the **Western Cape Library Cooperative**

Group Therapy from page 83

porting these products. But frankly, it has not been a problem since many patrons ignore the material or don't know it exists, have little need for help, or else try to use the products and can't but give up and do not ask for help. It's hard to know exactly how much use is going on, but periodicals service staff report that the accompanying materials are not requested by patrons.

In my opinion, such accompanying materials are often not so useful, but serve as "bridge" products to Web-based materials. More and more publishers are finding that Web-based materials are easier to control and update, and are not so platform-dependent. I would encourage publishers to focus on Web-ready supplements and forget the CD-ROMs. I think this discussion will be moot sooner rather than later. 

(**Calico**), the **Free State Library and Information Consortium (Frelico)** and consortia in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Information science education and research is a feature of most of the ten major universities in South Africa, though there are concerns about just where graduates from these courses will find jobs. There are some initiatives underway to amalgamate and streamline tertiary academic institutions to create "centres of excellence" and these may result in fewer schools of information science in the future.

In conclusion, if you do have the opportunity to visit South Africa then do take it. You will be assured of a very warm welcome by professionals who are doing their very best to provide the highest quality of service in difficult economic and social conditions.

Reed acquisition of Harcourt

In the June 2001 issue of *ATG*, p. 10, there was a reference to the fact that the potential acquisition of the STM business of **Harcourt** had been referred to the **Competition Commission** in the UK. The report of the **Commission** was published on 5 July and concluded that the merger was not against the public interests.

However, it was only by a majority decision of 2-1 by the three-person panel of **Commission** members, and the dissenting member of the panel insisted that his views were included in the report. This 152 page report is well worth purchasing if you have any interest in STM publishing. It contains a wealth of information on the background to the STM business, and sets out very clearly the issues about pricing, substitution and market position, with some very useful tables that the staff of the **Competition Commission** developed from many different sources. Some commercially sensitive information about the business activities of the companies has been deleted from the published report.

Included in an appendix is the evidence from a range of university libraries and

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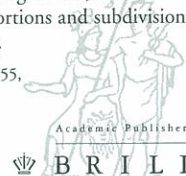
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other organisations and individuals. Almost without exception these organisations were against the acquisition going ahead. I did find some of the comments given in evidence by **Reed** and **Harcourt** a little disingenuous, and it will be very interesting to look back on the report in a year or two. In the UK the report costs just over \$25, and is excellent value for money. The details that you will need is that it is **Command Paper Cm5186** and the title is *Reed Elsevier plc and Harcourt General Inc. – A report on the proposed merger*. The report is published by **The Stationery Office** (the UK equivalent of the GPO) and the Website is www.clicktso.com. 

A View from Africa

by **Digby Sales** (Collection Development Manager, Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa) <digby@uctlib.uct.ac.za>

At the end of last year I returned full of enthusiasm from my second **Charleston Conference** (the first one being in 1993). It remains an important forum for discussion on acquisition issues despite the increase in its size. However, I am very worried about how we in Africa (and many other parts of the Third World) are going to keep up with the trends in scholarly publishing. Hav-

ing also attended **ALA** in San Francisco this June, my concern has only increased.

The push, especially on the STM front, is for journal publishing to appear in only the electronic format, as this will reduce the publishing costs. The change may be welcomed by First World countries, but lack of access to the Internet will side-line many African academics.

continued on page 88